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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 003552

SIPDIS

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV PTER IZ

SUBJECT: SECTARIAN VIOLENCE HAMPERS SUNNI PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL PROCESS

Classified By: POLCOUNS ROBERT S. FORD FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. The August 25 discovery of the bodies of 36 Iraqis, apparently all Sunni Arabs allegedly taken from their Baghdad homes early on August 24 by men in Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) uniforms, has shaken the Sunni Arab community. Sunni Waqf head Ahmed Abdul Gafur al Samarai told PolCouns on August 27 that he was less interested in discussing constitutional issues than talking about what he called the regular killings occurring in and around Baghdad by men in ISF uniforms. Waqf officials claim that sectarian targeting, allegedly by ISF, continues unabated. It is possible the killers were not ISF. However, in the absence of a credible government response, few among our Sunni Arab contacts think the Interior Ministry is not responsible. Achieving greater Sunni engagement in the political process will likely be an uphill battle; this type of violence can only make the effort harder. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) The August 25 discovery of 36 bodies in Wasit Province near the Iraq-Iran border, alleged to be those of Sunnis taken from Baghdad's Al-Huriya neighborhood in the early morning hours of August 24, has shaken the Sunni community. Sunni Waqf head Ahmed Abdul Gafur al Samarai told PolCouns on August 27 that he would not discuss constitutional issues when Sunnis are being killed by what appears to be Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). On August 29 he told PolCouns that the Waqf had assisted families in burying their dead. Adnan Dulaimi, the former head of the Waqf, told Ambassador August 30 that he had attended the funerals and said the incident had shaken the Baghdad Sunni community. Dulaimi wondered how convoys could of police vehicles and men in uniform move through the curfew-restricted streets at night if they are not police.

¶3. (C) According to Waqf Administrator Naji Ithawi, witnesses claim that men in Commando uniforms driving Iraqi Police (IP) vehicles took the 36 men from their homes. (NOTE: Other reports indicate that the abductors wore army uniforms. END NOTE.) The bodies were found partially clothed, handcuffed, with bullet wounds to the head. Ithawi said police discovered the ration card of Hussein Ahmed al-Mashdani in his underwear and notified the family of his location. Al-Mashdani's brother, a guard at the Waqf, went to Kut, where the bodies were being stored, and identified his brother's body. According to Ithawi, the other victims were also members of the al-Mashdani tribe. The families, fearing for their own lives, were afraid to travel to Kut to retrieve the bodies. Deputy Assistant Minister of Interior Ali Mali, working with Samarai, coordinated the return of the bodies to Baghdad. Minister of Interior Baqr Jabr, a Shi'a SCIRI party member, told the Ambassador August 29 that the Ministry would conduct an investigation into the killings.

¶4. (C) Both Samarai and Ithawi claim that similar incidents of violence are commonplace. Ithawi said that there have been multiple incidents of Sunnis taken into custody by what appear to be ISF, only to be found dead within days of their detention. He noted the case of Amir Zaen al-Ani, an engineer with the Waqf, who was taken into custody the week of August 22 -- allegedly by ISF. Al-Ani's family said they were asked to pay USD 30,000 but were able to only come up with USD 20,000. Al-Ani's body was discovered several days after the money was delivered to his captors.

COMMENT

¶5. (C) This type of violence, and the perception of impunity by ISF, will make it only harder to increase constructive Sunni engagement in the political process. Especially problematic is the conviction among many Sunni political figures -- men bred on conspiracy -- that the Iranian-backed Badr Corps is manipulating the Interior Ministry either by conducting rogue operations or accessing Interior Ministry materials. We are not sure who is responsible for this incident; it is possible these were not ISF. However, in the absence of any credible government response, few Sunni Arabs with whom we speak believe the Ministry of Interior is not responsible. END COMMENT.
Khalilzad